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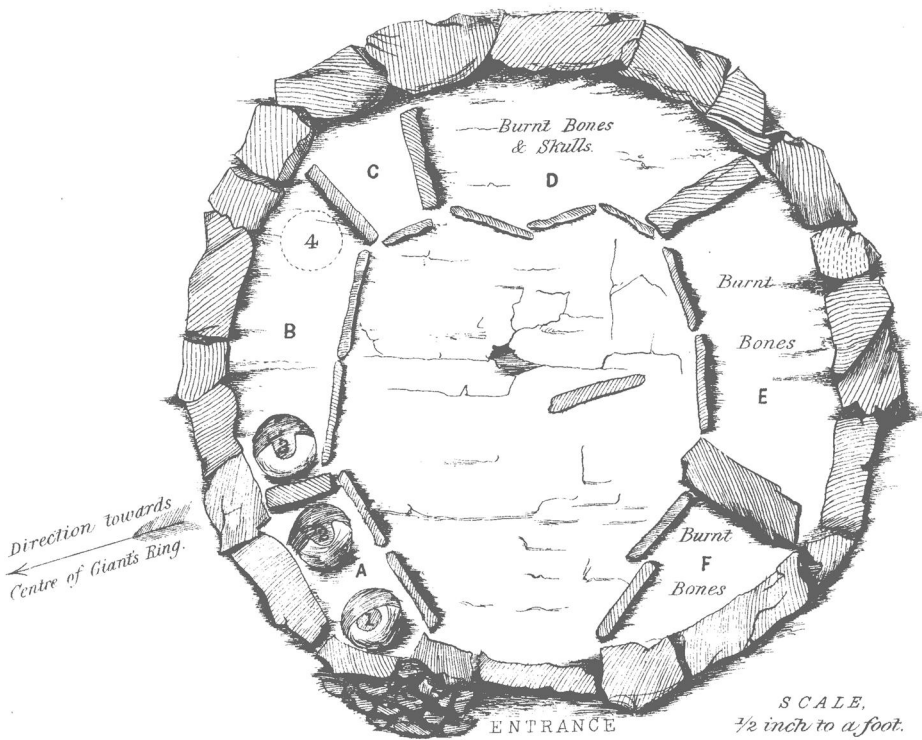
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DISCOVERY OF AN ANCIENT SEPULCHRAL CHAMBER.

A paragraph to the effect that an ancient tomb containing an urn, skulls, and burnt bones, had been discovered on the farm of Mr. David Bodel, at Ballynehatty (adjoining the "Giant's Ring," in the county Down), having appeared in the *Belfast News-Letter* of November 21st, 1855, Mr. Getty and the Editor of this Journal immediately visited the spot; and found, to their no small satisfaction, that not only was the statement correct, but that Mr. Bodel, with singular good taste and judgment, had further prohibited all interference with the place, the moment its true character became apparent, in order to afford opportunity for its careful examination; and that he had locked up the skulls in his dwelling-house to protect them from injury.

Upon Saturday, Nov. 24, with Mr. Bodel's permission, several members of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society met upon the spot, which they very carefully explored; and we have now the pleasure of placing upon record the result of this examination.

The place is situated in a field almost adjoining the north side of the great circular embankment known as "the Giant's Ring." The chamber discovered was subterraneous, and consisted of a circular space seven feet in diameter, enclosed to the height of about two feet by a wall of large irregular blocks of weather-worn stones from two to three feet long, their faces inclining considerably inwards, and their interstices closely wedged up with sharp slate-like fragments of stone. Facing the East, an opening about two feet wide had been left for an entrance; and within, five irregularly shaped flags, from twenty to twenty-four inches high, and of various breadths and thicknesses, were placed on end, their edges projecting towards the centre, thereby dividing about two feet of the circumference of the floor into six irregular compartments. These were raised somewhat above the general level of the floor, and separated from the central portion by a ledge of rough flags set edgewise in the ground, above which they projected from three to four inches. The remainder of the floor was somewhat concave, and the whole flagged with irregularly shaped stones, adjusted to each other with considerable care. A sixth upright stone, similar to those which divided the circumference into compartments, stood upon the flagged floor, in the position marked upon the accompanying plan, and may have been employed to support the roof while in progress of construction; but it fell so soon as the sand was removed from its base. The structure was covered with large quarried flag-stones, resting upon the wall, the perpendicular uprights, and each other, gradually projecting towards the centre, and secured where requisite by careful pinning up with thin stones. The height of the chamber in the centre was three feet, and the upper surface of the covering flags lay eighteen inches below the level of the field; consequently the ground must have been excavated to a depth of at least five feet for its construction. Although a portion of the roof was the first part removed, the entrance is stated to have been closed with flags, in such a manner as would have permitted of their removal without injury to the rest of the structure: and the whole appears to have been enclosed and covered with small stones, as though at one time it had formed the centre of a cairn. The ground, however, being occupied with potato-pits, this point must, for the present, remain undecided.

The accompanying ground-plan affords a very correct view of the appearance of the interior, and with its aid the nature and position of the contents of this interesting sepulchre can be described in a few words.

In the compartments A and B, to the left of the entrance, were found three urns of burnt clay (1, 2, and 3) filled with burnt bones. They were embedded in the loose soil which had accumulated round them during the lapse of ages, and, as seen *in situ*, appeared to be about twelve inches high by ten broad; but they were in so decayed a condition that nothing but mere fragments of them could be preserved. The ornamentation upon these was of three different characters, and apparently of

the very rudest description. The existence of a fourth urn was indicated by the quantity of dark half-burnt earth, intermixed with the bones found at the spot marked 4; but no fragment of sufficient size to establish this beyond doubt was obtained. The compartment C was vacant. D contained some few burnt bones, (and resting upon them, and buried in sand quite dissimilar to the material in which the urns lay) two tolerably perfect skulls, and sufficient fragments to prove that five skulls, or at least portions of five, had been there deposited.* This part, however, had been so much disturbed at the time of its discovery, and the bones were in so fragile a condition, that irreparable injury had been done before Mr. Bodel stopped the examination. In the same compartment were found three unburnt human ribs and a humerus;—also part of the pelvis of a small cow, and a few fragments of the bones of a sheep or goat, likewise unburnt. E and F contained large quantities of burnt bones, divided into several parcels, by thin stones, as if to prevent the intermixture of the remains of different individuals. No implement or ornament of any kind was found in or about the spot: nor was any trace of ornament or inscription observable upon the stones of which this rude chamber was constructed. Amongst the burnt bones, contained both in the urns and the recesses E and F, were numerous fragments of skulls, clearly proving that the *unburnt* crania could not possibly have been portions of the individuals by whose *burnt remains* they were surrounded. From the position occupied by three undisturbed lower jaws, the heads had evidently been deposited upon their bases, with their faces towards the *West*; no portion whatever of the trunk having been deposited with them. Unfortunately but two crania at all available for the purposes of science were rescued from destruction; and in these the lower jaw of one is absent altogether, and that of the other is very much broken. Both skulls are apparently those of females, from twenty to twenty-five years of age. They are exceedingly small, long, low, and narrow; their greatest circum-

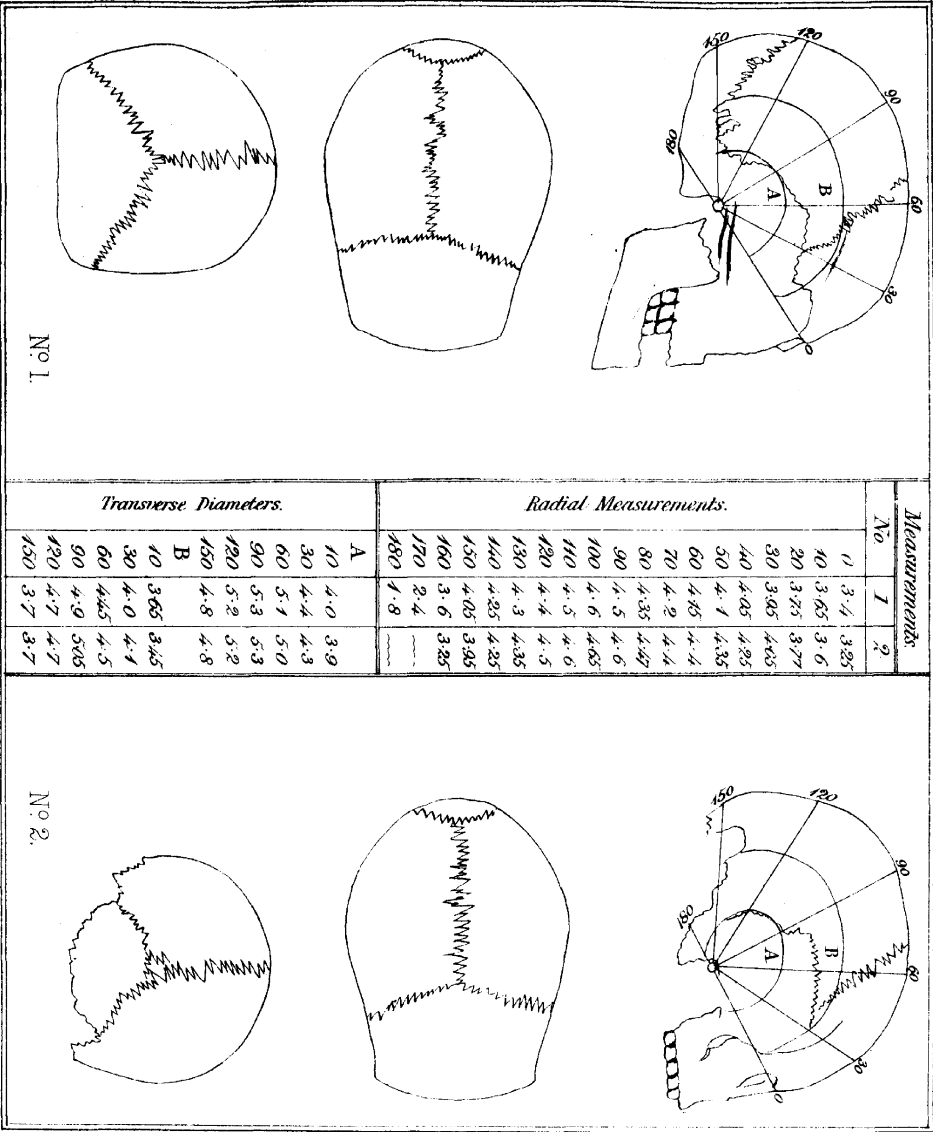
* The practice of removing the head from the trunk in order to bury it in some celebrated locality must have been one of not unusual occurrence amongst the early Irish. Thus we find—in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, (Note by O'Donovan)—

A.D. 1213.—“*Kinnily*, “*cenn eitigh*,” i.e., “the head of Etech,” so called, (according to a note in the *Felire Aengus*, at the 7th of April), from Etech, an ancient Irish heroine, whose head was interred here. It is the name of a townland and parish in the barony of Ballybrit in the King's County.”—And in Petrie's paper on Tara, it is mentioned that the head of Cuchullin was buried on Tara-hill, separately from the body.—Also in the *Annals*, anno 565, it is recorded that the head of Diarmaid Mac Fergus was buried at Clonmacnoise; and his body where he was killed, at Connor, county Antrim.—Dr. O'Donovan, in a note just received from him says:—“Such facts as the burial of heads separately from the bodies ought to be all carefully recorded, when evidence is discovered.”

The interment in the present instance in sand, would imply that the heads had been buried with their integuments, and were thus covered to protect the senses of sight and smell from offence, in a chamber chiefly in-

tended for the reception of burnt bones.—As a caution to other observers, it may be well to note, that one portion of a skull when discovered was closely covered with what was at once pronounced by some to be hair—long thin fibres, exceedingly hair-like, and of a reddish-brown hue: when carefully examined, however, they proved to be but root fibrils, which had penetrated to that depth. Is it not probable, that the instances recorded of hair having been found upon crania which had been entombed for thousands of years, may admit of similar explanation?

“Ballynehatty”—(this is the orthography adopted in the Ulster Inquisitions) Dr. O'Donovan writes—“is a name that has puzzled him for a long time; but he feels satisfied it has nothing to do with *heads* or with the monument now described.” “*Atty* is resolvable into *ait tigh*, i.e. site of a house. There is also an old term—*taitte* “a *tate* of land;” but, in Dr. O'Donovan's opinion, the name of the townland has no reference to either of these.” In Dalaradia, (the old name of this district), he suggests “there was a Milesian family-name of *O'Hatty*, from which it is possible the place may have received its designation.” He doubts whether any Irish name commencing with *Bully* is very ancient.



MEASUREMENTS OF 2 CRANIA FROM SEPULCHRAL CHAMBER,
BALLYNEHATTY. COUNTY OF DOWN.

ference being only twenty inches, and their measurements by the craniometer much below any that have previously come under the writer's observation. These measurements are given in a tabular form, and three reduced outline tracings of each skull are likewise furnished. Though so excessively low, the coronal region is nevertheless pretty full and rounded; indeed, in No. 2, well and gracefully arched. In both the anterior portion is proportionately short, and the posterior long; the preponderating volume being posterior to the opening of the ears, in this respect exceeding in *absolute* measurement several crania greatly their superiors in size. The nasal bones are defective, but would appear to have been somewhat prominent. The cheek-bones are large, prominent, projecting outwards below; the cavities for the eyes large, with an outward and downward inclination. In No. 1 the jaws are rather prominent; the under one long, very slight, and shallow. At death the teeth must have been complete; but many have dropped out of their sockets. Such as remain are remarkably sound, somewhat worn down in No. 1, especially in the lower jaw; but scarcely any in No. 2. In each the wisdom-teeth have not quite attained the elevation of the molars. The sutures are strongly marked; the zygomatic arches, as far as can be inferred, moderately prominent; and the mastoid processes small and feebly developed. No 1 appears to have a large frontal sinus, to which is due its excess of prominence at zero over No. 2; whereas No. 2 progressively ascends from that point, ranging considerably above No. 1 throughout the whole coronal region, exhibiting in every respect a finer and more elevated specimen of the same type.*

The remaining cranial fragments are—a large massive powerful male jaw, the teeth considerably worn down, but not more than would indicate middle age; the upper, and portion of the lower, jaw of an adult male, younger than the preceding; and the greater portion of a large lower jaw of a middle aged female: these, with two more perfect crania, making up the full number of five, already stated to have been either wholly or in part deposited in this remarkable sepulchral chamber.

The soil in which the tomb was constructed is extremely light and sandy, changing as it descends into pure sand. It was in this that the skulls were embedded. No doubt this absorbent character of the soil, by protecting the contents of the chamber from excessive moisture, contributed greatly to their preservation.

Having now recorded with all practicable care the results of this exhumation, the questions naturally suggest themselves—to what age did these individuals belong? were they of the primæval occupants of this country, or of more recent origin? and have we, in the relics themselves, or in the circumstances under which they were discovered, any reasonable clue to even an approximate solution of these inquiries?

In the present state of our knowledge, an appeal to the remains themselves must, of necessity, be fruitless; inasmuch as we have yet to learn what were, *with certainty*, the physical characteristics of

* The mode of taking the measurements of the skulls by the Craniometer has been already described in this Journal, vol. 1. p. 201.

the primæval occupants of this country, and of those who immediately succeeded or displaced them ; and we have no prospect of obtaining this information except by the examination of tombs, whose chronological order has been ascertained from other sources. Neither can we draw any satisfactory conclusion from the fashion of the interments ; finding, as we do, no less than three several usages—cremation *with* urn burial—cremation *without* urn burial,—and the entombment of unburnt portions of the dismembered body,—all coterminously adopted *within the same chamber*. In the present case, therefore, our inquiries are necessarily limited to the chamber itself, and to the locality in which it is situated, which, as it happens, is one of more than ordinary importance ; its site being in close proximity to the remarkable structure known to antiquarians as the “Giant’s Ring,”—a level circular enclosure of rather more than ten acres, surrounded by a high earthen mound, and having near its centre an undoubted cromlech. What was this “Giant’s Ring ?” Whether the site of some pagan worship ? or the place of assembly of the tribes of some early people ?—Who shall say ?

The learned and reliable researches of Petrie, by unravelling the mystery of our Round Towers, have carried us back, at one step authentically, some 1400 years ; the towers themselves testifying that even at that remote period the art of architecture had attained to no mean excellence in Ireland ; from thence in his disquisition upon the hill of Tara, we are again carried backwards through a different condition of society, until the *history* of that ancient residence of the early monarchs of Ireland is lost in the *vague* and shadowy romance of bardic legend : sufficient corroborative testimony, however, being adducible to prove that for centuries before our Christian era it had existed as a seat of regal government. If, then, our national traditions can extend to so remote a period, and transmit to us, despite of their inflated exaggerations, no small admixture of truth, how exceedingly remote indeed must the date of these places be, which, though once of *evident note*, have outlived their history, leaving no record, either in popular tradition or bardic lore.

Such precisely is the condition of the “Giant’s Ring.” Not even a surmise as to its use or origin exists ; and we may reasonably conclude, therefore, that it and its associate structures date from a period long antecedent to Tara, and are the work of a people whose usages and ceremonies had passed away before the order of things, of which Tara was the representative, had come into existence. Remote as that period may be, however, we should scarcely be warranted in assuming it to be the epoch of the very earliest inhabitants. So extensive a work as the “Giant’s Ring” implies the existence, at the time of its erection, of a considerable population and combined efforts of labour such as could scarcely be expected from a primæval people depending for subsistence upon fishing and the chase. It is possible, therefore, that we may not greatly err if we venture to attribute the construction of the “Giant’s Ring” either to a more advanced race, or to a race in a more advanced stage of progress :—which of the two, future researches can alone decide.

The proximity of this sepulchral chamber, its rude cromlech-like structure, and the total absence of any tradition respecting it, would seem to identify it in time and origin with the “Giant’s Ring.” Like

it, too, it must have been the product of an advancing and considerable population. Such a receptacle for the dead, with provision for successive interments, could only have been constructed to meet the wants of a family or tribe, attached by residence to one locality, and consequently dependent to some extent upon agricultural and pastoral occupations for support: an inference further corroborated by the presence of bones of oxen and other domesticated animals.

So far, therefore, as the meagre materials at our command warrant an inference, we may conclude it to be probable, that the crania obtained in this sepulchral chamber represent the early, though not the very earliest, occupants of Ireland.

In addition to the facts observed upon the present occasion, it may be well to record, upon the testimony of Mr. Bodel, that the field in which this discovery was made forms part of a farm held by him and his family for several generations; and that, on various occasions, he and his predecessors have discovered throughout the same piece of ground indications of extensive interments; vast quantities of human bones having been turned up by the plough, both in his own time and that of his father, especially in the vicinity of the present dwelling-house. In the boundary fence of the field, facing the Giant's Ring, is an enormous stone which he suspects to be a cromlech, and intends to have uncovered. Very near this spot there were taken up in the field, a little below the surface, many cart-loads of human bones, but without there being any mound or mark to distinguish the place. On the site of the dwelling-house itself, which is not many perches distant, was a mound which, on being removed at the time of building the house, disclosed several short stone coffins, containing earthen urns and burnt bones. In several parts of the same field similar coffins were found subsequently, all formed of stone slabs, and having a slab at the bottom and one as a lid. These in most cases contained urns. The coffins were all shorter than a man. In one of the urns was found a skull by Mr. Bodel himself; and in each of two others, bones, and a stone implement. One of the implements was minutely described by Mr. Bodel, as a black stone, six inches long, knobbed at each end and hollowed between, with a small hole passing through the centre of the intermediate stem. The other was a yellow stone tapering at each end, almost resembling in size and shape a gimlet head, and pierced in like manner at the centre with a small hole. In another urn, along with the usual burnt bones, were two flint arrow-heads. Occasionally stone axes have been found in the field. At one extremity of it, farthest from the house, there was a spot several perches in extent, on which the vegetation was observed to be always bad. On digging it up it was found, for several feet deep, to consist of a peculiar dark-coloured and *soapy* mould, and intermixed with it were observed a number of red stones, presenting the appearance of having been discoloured by strong heat. Near this spot was a small mound, somewhat elevated; and Mr. Bodel's father, about fifty or sixty years ago, having an idea that he might find something valuable within it, determined to open it. On removing the earth a little he came to some large blocks of stone standing upright, and was then fully persuaded that his hopes would be realized. He therefore removed the entire

mound and found it to contain three very large stones placed on end, and sloping towards each other at the top. On examining underneath this inclosure he found an urn and a quantity of small bones, but nothing further. In the same part of the field were found four rings made of a black light substance, like jet, the largest about four inches in diameter, and the other three smaller, in regular succession, the whole of them fitting exactly one within the other, so that when thus placed they presented the appearance of a circular grooved disk. In one part of the field Mr. Bodel pointed out a spot where a pillar-stone was buried some years ago in clearing the ground. Stone coffins and urns, exactly similar to those found in Mr. Bodel's field, were found at different times, in the adjoining lands held by Mr. George Thomson, Mr. McKeown, and Mr. Frederick Russell; and there was at least one artificial chamber discovered resembling the one now described.

NOTE.—While these sheets were in the hands of the printer the intelligence reached us that a stone bearing an inscription had been discovered in an unexplored recess of the chamber. The spot was therefore again visited, when a stone said to have been so found was actually exhibited to us. It proved, however, to be a very clumsy attempt at a hoax, perpetrated by a poetical character in the neighbourhood, who must have mis-spent a good deal of time and ingenuity in fabricating

and engraving on a piece of sand-stone the following absurd inscription; which we only notice to prevent future misapprehension :—

[*Death's Head and cross-bones.*]

PHELIM Ω MAGAN

PICT CHIEF DYDE

I O C L X V.